

Lodge Education Program

Chandler Lodge #138

Date: 14 April 09

Recently a few of us attended the inspection held at the Ohio Masonic Home. It is located right here in our district and yet many of us know little of history.

It started about 1840 when discussion began at the Grand Lodge of Ohio to establish a home for the elderly masons as other states had adopted this as an avenue of charity to aged brothers. This was especially needed and grew quickly in southern and other low-income areas of the nation. It should be noted that there was two earlier attempts to start a home but it never got beyond the committee stage of discussion. The third attempt was successful largely due to the efforts of William Hillman who was the Grand High Priest of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Ohio. His plan specifically called for the Masonic Home to be a benefit of worthy distressed Ohio Master masons, their wives, widows and orphans. This committee was greatly inclined to succeed upon the generous donation of a local Springfield businessman.

The cornerstone for the first of the Home's building 'the Bushnell' was laid in 1892. Commonly known today as the 'castle' its given name was in honor of Asa Bushnell who donated \$10,000 to the construction budget. This was the motivation of the third committee to actually get the Masonic Home Program running in Ohio. Asa Bushnell was a large figure in Clark County and Springfield history. After returning from service as a Civil war general he became president of the Springfield Gas Company. He also managed an agriculture implement manufacturing facility which later evolved into Navistar which still operates in Springfield. He then became the 1st president of the 1st National Bank, which evolved into Banc Ohio, and later into National City Bank. The bank was based in another famous office building in Springfield the 'Bushnell Building', which Asa also funded and built. Coincidentally this building is home to this years District Reception in June, it is listed on Register of National Historic Places also of note; this building is also where the patent documents for the airplane were prepared by the Wright Brothers. Mr Bushnell went on to serve two terms as the 40th Governor of Ohio, from 1896-1900.

Asa Bushnell's donation of \$10,000 was used to purchase 223 acres of the Leffel farm on the west edge of Springfield that skirted the Mad River with the stipulation that construction would be upon the hill with an unobstructed view of the river valley and downtown Springfield. The first elderly resident arrived by 1895 and continues today, in addition the home also served as a children's orphanage from 1897 until 1956. It served over 740 children during this time with a stable environment that included schooling in Springfield, a pool and exercise room, movies on Saturday night, and Sunday school at Wittenberg University. By 1921 the home had 200 residents and 2127 visitors at the campus. The facility was supported by the 163,447 Masons of Ohio paying \$1.00 each into the Grand Lodge fund. The final construction price of the Bushnell in 1892 was 104,000 and its success ultimately lead to the expansion of the Springfield campus which from 1895 until today has served more than 12,000 elderly masons; currently there are over 300 residents of the Home. For more information or to see this beautiful building for yourself, visit the 25th anniversary of the Ohio Masonic Home Day on Sunday June 14th, 2009.

Source:

OMH Website: History of Clark County: Wikipedia – Asa Bushnell